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Call for Papers

The writing(s) of sports journalism

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Sport occupies an important place in the economy of today's modern media. It features in specialist publications and other outlets but also in the general media. Sports stars, results and periodic events (World Cups, Olympic Games) are part of what is known as "news".

The first specialised publications appeared towards the middle of the nineteenth century (*The Field* in 1853 ; *Les Sports* in 1854) and sports results started to feature progressively in newspapers (for example, horse racing). Such publications experienced considerable growth from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, reflecting the increasing democratisation of sport and its inclusion in public policy. They also intersected with the economic interests of industrialists in the car and cycle manufacturing sectors. From this period onwards, sport has become the subject-matter of reports and columns; it is covered and relayed by news agencies; it begins to have its own dedicated staff: reporter/journalists and even discipline-specific specialists such as photographers and radio and television commentators.

In the history of journalism, sports journalism occupies a special place. It was first studied by its own practitioners, as an awareness of the importance of constituting a specialist sub-set of the profession developed. Furthermore, many sports journalists were themselves current or former sportspersons.

In the last fifteen years however, research has specifically targeted the relationships between sport and the press. This body of work has enabled inventories of the sporting press, both local and regional, to be made, has brought its actor/protagonists (journalists, photographers, writers) to our attention, has explored the links with the worlds of business and politics and interrogated the rhetoric of sporting discourse. Much of this work has been devoted to a particular newspaper,

sport, period or region. There are relatively few instances of “transversal” research, while research describing the actual poetics of sports journalism is even rarer still.

Against this backdrop, our study, resulting from the work carried out in the Numapresse network (<http://www.numapresse.org/>), aims at deepening familiarity with and knowledge of sports journalism, having recourse to lesser-used disciplinary approaches and also to techniques enabling a renewed understanding of the area, including discourse analysis, history, digital humanities and the poetics of journalism.

A number of avenues are worth considering.

1. The **poetic modalities of sports journalism** are already well established at the start of the twentieth century, whereby an event and its actor/participants are recounted/narrated in a competitive environment pitting different media and journalists themselves against each other. The account/narrative is aimed at a specific audience which it contributes to both generate and socialise. Narrative techniques, the creation of the hero and the dramatisation of the event enter into this framework. From an enunciative perspective, the writer’s positioning of self and ethos, linked to the worth of his/her signature, condition how a particular sport is represented (most notably by playing on a sense of distance or competence, aristocratic ethos, choices between postures of celebration and investigation, or the invention of new genres such as *gonzo* journalism, initially a sporting genre in the Anglo-American world). Is it possible to periodise the models in question in a more nuanced way and identify both significant inflections and decisive innovations? In a similar vein, can questions regarding what is capable of being represented, how aesthetics are deployed and the spectacular be framed historically?
2. The **organisational conditions governing how sports writing** takes place have changed over time. Work places/spaces, tools, the possibilities of diffusion and form have progressively constructed different relationships with writing for the journalist. Such organisational conditions deal with factors which are as much external as internal to the manufacture of sports information. On an external front, international coverage of events, where diverse practices of how sport is narrated meet, must thus be taken into account. It should also be noted that sports journalists develop specific strategies to become more widely known or to stand out. This is also the case for newspapers, given that sport is such a keenly contested ground for competition between them. Internally, sports journalism has always operated on two very distinct levels: on the one hand, events and their actual results; on the other, the attendant reporting, enquiry and commentary. Can the evolution of such practices be described? How do we conceive their most recent modalities, with the advent of “robots”, leading to the automation of the more factual aspects of sports writing? What debates does this prompt as far as sports writing (its function, its importance) and the role of the journalist are concerned?
3. The discourse of sport is part of social discourse which in turn it helps feed. **Their interactions** are worth studying. Accompanied by images which generate headlines and page lay-out effects, sports narrative cannot properly be conceived as a purely textual performance. But how do the different elements of media inter-relate and develop their respective effects among themselves? How is text written in a world of live radio, television and the internet? How does competition among the media condition the respective narratives of different supports? More broadly still, how does sports writing dovetail with representations of the world such as nationalism, racism, engagement, sexism, or with

management of territory and tourism? The discourse of sport can of course be profoundly political when it triggers wars (match between Honduras and El Salvador) or attempts to solve conflict (apartheid in South Africa). It can also be polemical, when it deals with questions of gender or transgender or makes the case for electronic sport to be afforded Olympic status.

4. **Sports journalism is tied-up with language.** It is articulated in a variety of linguistic registers, from the temporal context of the story to recounted monologue, from a discourse of connivance to one of distance, from slang to literary pastiche, from technical discourse to ordinary language. All of this concerns lexicon, but also syntax, codes of expression, rhetoric. More generally, can these different discourses be linked to the various actors on the sporting stage (from trainers/managers, to the sports men and women and indeed to spectators), to differentiations between sports themselves (do the fencer and the judoka speak the same language?) and to the discursive traditions of different sporting events? Have certain newspapers and media developed their own distinctive ideolectic? Are there realities of writing which reveal not just how work is organised, but also differing roles and relations which might point to a way of doing journalism that is unique to sport?

Corpus

The editorial board will prioritise submissions dealing with comparative or transversal themes over case studies, which are already abundantly documented in existing bibliographies. The subject matter of the corpus is the print media, but also radio, television and internet media. We will therefore select submissions anchored in recognised form of the sporting press (newspaper, magazine, radio, television, illustrated press, internet) and will particularly favour approaches framed by reference to the four avenues mentioned above, as well as the digital analysis of large corpora.

The deadline for submitting the final manuscripts (30 to 50,000 characters, including notes and bibliography) is **1st of October 2020**, at : paul.aron@ulb.ac.be; ruadhan.cooke@nuigalway.ie; flecam@ulb.be; ruben.arnoldo.gonzalez@gmail.com

Manuscripts may be written in **English, French, Portuguese or Spanish.**

Double blind review.

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